The future of democracy

Philippe Aigrain
CEO, Sopinspace, Society for Public Information Spaces
Co-founder, La Quadrature du Net

The future of life, 20 June 2011
..., he argues that the Internet is subject to the power of the state and therefore is largely impotent as a mechanism for promoting democracy. He shows that throughout the world, the Internet is a) more likely to be used for entertainment purposes, b) censored in ways that are not easily surmountable, c) used as a tool for propaganda by both governments and individuals that are not pro-West, and d) used for spying on dissidents.
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If surveillance, censorship and propaganda are the three pillars of authoritarianism, information, organization and leverage are the counter-pillars of citizen power. And the Internet provides the best and most appropriate infrastructure for strengthening all three.

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I reviewed Evgeny Morozov's new book, The Net Delusion. Excerpt below, the whole review [here](#).

> k is that they are online, or they are easy. Really works. The Internet is not the technology that is failing politics but it is

> by watching cat videos online, but because

> about the dangers of an internet-centric prism of the Net, Morozov himself is

> pillars of authoritarianism, information, power. And the Internet provides the

> ng all three. Morozov correctly claims

> is not the same as ineffective or

> of loccats. The point of loccats is not the loccats themselves, but to share them with friends, comment on them, make more of them, and enter the community via the joke. It's the community, not the cat, that matters. (If you doubt this, try selling a book of loccats and see how well it does.) I write this review in the aftermath of an atrocity; the assassination attempt in Arizona on a Congresswoman that claimed the lives of six others including a child. Every Internet community I am part of is reeled and there is widespread discussion on most of them about the event. Fifteen years ago, we'd all be watching TV, not communicating with each other."

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**Review of the Net Delusion and Response to Jaron Lanier on Wikileaks**

**2011 JANUARY 13**

by zeynep

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These popular insurrections in the Arab world constitute a turning point in the social and political history of humanity. And perhaps the most important of the internet-led and facilitated changes in all aspects of life, society, the economy and culture. And this is just the start. The movement is picking up speed, despite Internet being an old technology, and deployed for the first time in 1969.
This movement will last and it will transform our world, because it is not a movement of organizations, it is a movement of persons, and persons are not created or destroyed, they are transformed.
so what does information technology and the Internet change?
People!
People!

People!

deliberative

Conversational
and self-representing
Did people really change because of IT and the Internet and how?
La culture numérique est porteuse de changement radical [...] : un nouveau regard sur le monde, sur l'histoire et une transformation sans pareille de l'espace public. La Tunisie comme l'Égypte symbolisent ce changement porté par le numérique : quelques noms propres, un lieu et la foule.

Milad Doueihi

Revolution from within
Friday, May 6th 2011, a day after the famous leaked Rajhi’s video, I decided to document people’s reactions. I parked my rental car at the outskirts of Habb Bourguiba, near the police headquarters. Thousands of police officers holding a wide range of weapons varying from clubs to machine guns were standing outside. As I reached the International Hotel, there was a group of 10 to 12 cops surrounding a journalist holding his camera while he was holding into it as if he is in a desert holding to what could only be torture. A gang of cops, there was a woman, who might be the journalist teaming up with a mob screaming, crying and begging those savages to let her friend go... My first impulse was to record the scene and film the aggression. Apparently, my action was the unpardonable deed. I soon found myself in police custody and there started a long journey of physical and mental torture that took place that day and this is the video: ( it is in Arabic )
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The fictitious
Amina Abdallah Araf

Four Egyptians have set themselves on fire, to protest humiliation and hunger and poverty...
digital literacy is unequally distributed and will remain « work in progress » +
democratic construction is more complex than democratic uprisings
pooled creativity
a common infrastructure (network and devices)
problematization of technology
a new meaning of rights and freedoms
a socially just distribution of time and resources
a critical appraisal of our cultural and political heritage
Referendum popolare - Tutta Italia (compreso voto estero)

I QUESITO, Privatizzazione dell'acqua
Affluenza: 54,8% (a chiusura delle operazioni)
SI 95,3%  NO 4,7%

II QUESITO, Profitti sull'acqua
Affluenza: 54,8% (a chiusura delle operazioni)
SI 95,8%  NO 4,2%

III QUESITO, Energia nucleare
Affluenza: 54,8% (a chiusura delle operazioni)
SI 94,1%  NO 5,9%

IV QUESITO, Legittimo impedimento
Affluenza: 54,8% (a chiusura delle operazioni)
SI 94,6%  NO 5,4%

Internet batte telecrazia: i motivi della vittoria

referendum, acqua, nucleare

DA LEGGERE

di Claudio Giua

Domenica pomeriggio, a risultati referendum ancora da acquisire, già ci si sbellicava davanti all'ultimo video messo in Rete, una rivisitazione in chiave non propriamente berlusconiana di una scena del film "L'aereo più pazzo del mondo". Quale miglior suggello per la prima campagna per il voto che ha avuto la Rete come principale palcoscenico?

Senza l'universo digitale - che, si badi bene, non è il digitale televisivo terrestre dominato da Rai e Mediaset, geneticamente ostili, con l'eccezione di RaiTre, ai quattro referendum - i si infatti non ce l'avrebbero fatta. Soprattutto, i promotori dei quesiti avrebbero fallito l'obiettivo quorum, come puntualmente si verificava da 16 anni.
For the road
Good morning,

I am the CEO of a small company developing free software tools and services for collaborative activities and participatory democracy. I am also one of the founders of La Quadrature du Net, a citizen group that defends fundamental rights and freedoms as they can be exerted in the digital world. It is in both capacities that I am going to share with you some views on the future of democracy.
Let's start by what has become known on the Internet has a conversation. It's a special kind of conversation because it does not proceed in one place, whether physical or digital. It is distributed in many places, but nonetheless the participants in the conversation read what the others write.

This particular conversation - on Internet and democracy- has taken « place » for years, but let's get on board when Evgeny Morozov publishes « The Net Delusion ».

You can read a factual review posted on the Amazon page for the book. Morozov comes from Belarus and clearly knows some things about authoritarian regimes. Some of his arguments can not be discarded without providing serious counter-arguments.
..., he argues that the Internet is subject to the power of the state and therefore is largely impotent as a mechanism for promoting democracy. He shows that throughout the world, the Internet is a) more likely to be used for entertainment purposes, b) censored in ways that are not easily surmountable, c) used as a tool for propaganda by both governments and individuals that are not pro-West, and d) used for spying on dissidents.

Now, « The Net Delusion » hits the bookstores on January 4th, 2011. That's really bad luck. The Tunisian revolution is developing at full scale. Even though social issues, a suicide protest and physical space demonstrations play a major role, the Tunisians speak of « the blogger revolution », the « jasmine revolution » expression being not yet coined. Internet filtering and censorship falls short of the total black-out needed to prevent expression and communication.

Let's say that nonetheless, at this stage, the jury is still out.

If surveillance, censorship and propaganda are the three pillars of authoritarianism, information, organization and leverage are the counter-pillars of citizen power. And the Internet provides the best and most appropriate infrastructure for strengthening all three.

In the next days, many analysts answer Morozov. Here, let’s read a young anthropologist of technology, Zeynep Tufekci (Univ. of Maryland, Baltimore County).

« If surveillance, censorship and propaganda are the three pillars of authoritarianism, information, organization and leverage are the counter-pillars of citizen power. And the Internet provides the best and most appropriate infrastructure for strengthening all three. »
These popular insurrections in the Arab world constitute a turning point in the social and political history of humanity. And perhaps the most important of the internet-led and facilitated changes in all aspects of life, society, the economy and culture. And this is just the start. The movement is picking up speed, despite Internet being an old technology, and deployed for the first time in 1969.

This man, dressed in official academic robe, is Manuel Castells, author of the « Information era » book trilogy. In 1988, when he published the first volume, titled « The networked society », he was aware of the potential of information technology for emancipatory and collaborative activities of individuals, but he doubted that they could counter-balance the grip of powerful powers on control and surveillance.

Read what he said last February : « These popular insurrections in the Arab world constitute a turning point in the social and political history of humanity. And perhaps the most important of the internet-led and facilitated changes in all aspects of life, society, the economy and culture. And this is just the start. »
"This movement will last and it will transform our world, because it is not a movement of organizations, it is a movement of persons, and persons are not created or destroyed, they are transformed."

May 27, 2011

Here is Manuel Castells again addressing the acampada of the #democraciareal Ya! movement in Barcelona. Every second of the talk is worth your time, but I call your attention on this sentence (my translation):

"This movement will last and it will transform our world, because it is not a movement of organizations, it is a movement of persons, and persons are not created or destroyed, they are transformed."
so what does information technology and the Internet change?

This somewhat strange and extraordinary statement of Manuel Castells gives us the key to answering our joint question of this morning: «so what does information technology and the Internet change?»
This answer is « People ». You have here a number of photographs of the indignados of the DemocraciaReal Ya ! Movement.

There is much to read in these pictures. Some of it is not new, like beautiful slogans. I was born to politics in a movement that had its share of them. Here you can read « If you don't let us dream, we won't let you sleep ». Such slogans may owe little to the Internet, but the take-up of the Internet by society owes a lot to these movements of the 1960s. The first (phone-based) Internet Service Provider was called WELL (1985) for 'Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link » and it was created by the publisher of the Whole Earth Catalog (1968-1972).

Cf. Stewart Brand and http://www.well.com/
There is much more to see in these photographs than slogans. What you can see are people who are deliberative. Actually they are in a frenzy of quiet deliberation, exploration of dissent and construction of consensus.

They, or I shoud say we, are also conversational, in the special sense I mentioned before: juxtaposing expressions and positions, the interaction taking place in each reader or listener.

They are keen on building representations of themselves as a collective, producing giant collections of photographs, videos of their own movements, and pooling them in freely accessible collections.

Finally, despite being radical reformers, they are non-violent.
Did people really change because of IT and the Internet and how?

Still, you can doubt these persons were actually transformed by what they do with computers and the Internet.
La culture numérique est porteuse de changement radical [...] : un nouveau regard sur le monde, sur l’histoire et une transformation sans pareille de l’espace public. La Tunisie comme l’Égypte symbolisent ce changement porté par le numérique : quelques noms propres, un lieu et la foule.

Milad Doueihi

Look at these portraits. Each of these persons is or was a blogger, in Tunisia, Egypt or Libya.

Milad Doueihi, a great analyst of digital cultures, wrote a number of commentaries on the Arab world revolutions in the Sens Public (Public Sense) journal and site. In one of them he wrote this: « Tunisia as Egypt are symbols of this change brought by the digital world: a few proper names, a place and the crowd. » The people you see in these photographs are the proper nouns, the few persons who became known to us at a distance. But around each of them they are others, sometimes just a few tens who read and value them. The crowd is a crowd of persons, and the persons exist through what they do, express and share with others.
If I were unlucky and this talk had been given two weeks ago, maybe one of these portraits would be of a fictitious character.

Yes, one has to be ready to encounter damaging deceits on the Internet, where they tend to be selectively amplified by mass media. The construction of our collective critical mind is not mature enough to detect all of them. The cost of preventing them from existing or being propagated would be much higher than the risks they open.
digital literacy is unequally distributed and will remain « work in progress »

+ democratic construction is more complex than democratic uprisings

Now, the path to a democracy of persons is not an easy one.

The problem of access has long hidden much more serious challenges.

Digital literacy is at the source of digital empowerment, but it is unequally distributed and it is a moving target. Culture, in the sense of what we must all share to know on what we differ and still be able to develop a civil democracy, will forever be an unfinished construct.

Opposing fierce authoritarian regimes called for an immense courage. Shaking up the inertia of democracies in crisis slowing sinking in injustice and withdrawing into an obsession of security needs a strident wake-up call. But the level of literacy needed to engage in the construction of proposals, of institutions, of daily management is an even greater challenge.
Digital activism often provides intermediate spaces between opposing bad policy and constructing alternatives. The idea there is to put in place a creative pool of ways to express opposition. Here are examples from the g8internet.com site La Quadrature du Net set up to oppose the recent eG8 promotional event in Paris. Some of the works are preexisting stuff that was just submitted to us, others were developed specifically for the site.

They are like other collective endeavours on the Internet: if you look just at their state on one given day, you might be disappointed, but if you follow them over time, you are impressed by the build-up of quality and capabilities.
a common infrastructure (network and devices)

problematization of technology

a new meaning of rights and freedoms

a socially just distribution of time and resources

a critical appraisal of our cultural and political heritage

We can't define the democratic culture of the future, but we can give some conditions for it to develop.

We need to have and to a keep a common digital infrastructure: a neutral Internet where information produced by any person travels the same than the « premium contents » formatted by transnational companies. But also open devices that are under the control of their users, that run whichever software they choose, and store their data where they have sovereign power on its use.

We need people who question technology just as they question governments or justice. Facebook is not the same as a self-hosted blog. We need to use each for it is good at, and know what service providers are using us for.

We need our good old rights and freedoms, but with the new meaning they must take in the digital world, so that they really serve the values they embody.

We need a socially just distribution of time and resources so that people can be better empowered to access and use digital technology. There is a chicken and egg problem there: we need social justice for all to benefit of a shared culture and democracy, but we need the present digital world to get there. The chicken can not wait for the egg: we must explore both paths in parallel.

Finally, we need to root our present actions in a critical appraisal of our past cultural and political heritage. We can find great inspiration and useful warnings there. The future of democracy must know where it comes from.
Whatever one thinks of popular initiative referenda, 8 days ago, in a country where there is a major discredit of political parties, the action of a few small groups and of many citizens on the Internet has made possible for more than 50% of registered voters to make major choices on substantial issues.
I have focused on democracy as a bottom-up process rooted in individuals and civil society. In my professional life, I am busy trying to help local government or public agencies interface with society and learn from it.

There is no decent society without political and social institutions. Which ones we need and how they can evolve or emerge from the present ones is a burning issue, and I would understand your frustration if you complain that I have not addressed it. However, understanding the new types of citizens of the digital era is the first step to start reflecting on the future of government, representative democracy and social institutions.

Thank you for your attention.